

Instead, she owned her own business in New York City. Later, she became a virtual member of the Edison family, moving in permanently around 1930. Other sources, like the *New York Times*, introduce an actual governess, Canadian Ethel K. Pardoe, who appeared in the paper because of the unfortunate circumstance of her suicide “induced by worry over the safety of the children of Mrs. Thomas A. Edison.” The stress she felt tending to the children of a world-famous man provides an unexpected and telling dimension to the daily roles of these seemingly silent women.

Personal recollections and details from contemporary written sources provide intimate glimpses that enrich the story of Glenmont’s domestic servants. The lives of these real people are now shared with visitors to Edison NHS in a variety of ways. The Glenmont site brochure notes the important role of domestics and lists a few

specific names. Regular displays for Women’s History Month at the laboratory complex of Edison NHS introduce Miss Bogue and maid Lena McCarthy Doyle Philips. A new traveling trunk will also feature some of these women. With names, faces, and more details, the service areas are now more alive. While artifacts belonging to those women are rare, the display of a few such objects from the park’s collections—Miss Pardoe’s sheet music, Lucy Bogue’s hand towel—make connections more tangible. As we continue forward with our research, always eager for more information, it is very exciting to see that discovering these lost lives is not nearly so impossible as we had thought.

Kristin Herron is the curator at Glenmont, Edison National Historical Site.

Kim Moon

“Raising Our Sites” Integrating Women’s History into Museums

In her 1989 essay, “Speaking of Women: Museums’ Representation of Women’s History,” Barbara Melosh suggests that women’s history doesn’t ask “How do women fit into history?” but rather, “How can the discipline of history be re-imagined to take account of female experience?” This question gets to the heart of a challenge currently facing many of the country’s historic sites and museums: how to move beyond token programming and predictable exhibits to make the story being conveyed to the public fully inclusive of both men’s and women’s experiences.

A few years ago, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) began to develop statewide programs that reflected the growing public interest in women’s studies. Historians and museum professionals acting as advisors to the Council on potential projects commented on the absence of women’s history at the state’s historic sites and museums. These Pennsylvania sites number over 500 and annually serve hundreds of thousands of Americans—schoolchildren, families, adults—who come to learn about our collective national history. These advisors reasoned that improvements in the presentation of women’s history were essential if the state’s historic facilities

were to truly represent the full range of American life.

In response, the Council developed “Raising Our Sites: Women’s History in Pennsylvania,” a three-year project to incorporate women’s history into the interpretation of 14 historic sites throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project served to foster collaboration between academic scholars and museum staff.

The sites selected to participate in “Raising Our Sites” were chosen mainly on the basis of interest—they had already begun some work in women’s history or expressed a strong interest and capacity for doing so. Comprising a diverse sample of Pennsylvania historic sites in terms of geographic locations, subject matter, and facility structure, they included one National Park Service site, five sites of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, six private historical societies and museums, one research library, and one college.

In preparation for participation in “Raising Our Sites,” staff from each of the sites worked with a project advisor to devise a workplan that detailed specific objectives in the integration of women’s history into their existing and/or planned



"Raising Our Sites" participants gather at the final statewide meeting to discuss issues relating to project implementation at their sites. Photo courtesy Pennsylvania Humanities Council.

A docent discusses women's varied roles with visitors at Pennsbury Manor, William Penn's restored summer home in Bucks county. Photo courtesy Pennsylvania Humanities Council.

interpretive programs and exhibits. These work-plans were then reviewed and revised on a yearly basis over the course of the project. Many of the sites saw their goals and direction change as new information on the lives and experiences of women related to their site was uncovered.

The Structure of "Raising Our Sites"

One of the crucial elements of the project was the relationships that developed between the site staff and the scholars with whom they worked. Each site worked first with a designated "local" scholar, who was based near the site and whose particular area of expertise was one in which they were otherwise lacking. The role of the local scholar varied from site to site, but included assisting the staff in uncovering resources carrying out specific research projects, overseeing research projects by volunteers, and reviewing materials in collections and archives both at the site and at others nearby. In general, they provided the roll-up-your-sleeves labor necessary to do the research-related tasks that overworked site staff often could not accomplish themselves.

In addition to the local scholar, many of the sites utilized the expertise of the project's advisors, which consisted of academic and public historians affiliated with universities, the Smithsonian, and other museums and research institutions. The advisors worked with individual sites in a consulting capacity, usually reviewing current exhibits and tours, examining collections and other holdings, and then brainstorming with staff about possible sources and direction for exhibits and programs. Interestingly, as the link between scholars and museum personnel grew, many site staff members were galvanized to pursue their own scholarship—an interest that brought many of them in the museum field initially but had been subsequently put aside by the day to day demands of museum operations.

The other important aspect of the project was a series of meetings open to all site staff and volunteers, advisors, and local scholars participating in the project. These meetings occurred at least once or twice yearly. In both the first and final years of the project, two-day statewide conferences for all participants featured nationally-known speakers and were structured for maximum interaction among the participants. In addition, seven thematic meetings on topics identified by the sites as critical to their work—industrial history and women's lives, inclusionary and innovative exhibiting strategies, and methods for getting women's history materials into school settings—were hosted by the various sites during the project.

These meetings were crucial to the success of "Raising Our Sites." They not only enabled participants to gather new information and renewed inspiration, but also served as a basis for a network of historic sites that shared a similar goal. Many historic sites and museums work in isolation, reaching out only to those resources in their immediate communities or existing networks. "Raising Our Sites" provided a way for participating sites to share their successes and challenges with others across the state, take a leadership role in a particular aspect of programming—archival usage, audience development, or educational outreach—and exchange resource information and expertise with other sites that were attempting similar work. This model of cooperation and



exchange was a vital component of the way women carried out their work throughout history; its inherent value was reinforced by its use in this project.

Sample "Raising Our Sites" Activity

By involving themselves in "Raising Our Sites," the participants were not simply jumping on a revisionist history bandwagon. In some cases, the work coincided with the site's overall planning effort for the coming years. Both the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and the Chester County Historical Society were in the process of transforming themselves into state-of-the-art history centers and were anxious to make their depiction of their community's history more representative. The staff at Pennsbury Manor, the reconstructed summer home of William Penn, used the opportunity to expand their focus to include information about specific servants and slaves who lived and worked at the site. The necessary research, done by local scholar Jean Soderlund of Lehigh University, involved a detailed search of local probate records, wills, inventories, and court minutes from the 17th century. Cynthia Andes, the local scholar for Drake Well Historic Site in Titusville, which interprets the oil history of northwestern Pennsylvania, stumbled upon boxes of period letters, lists, diaries, clothing, and other artifacts, which will now be included in tours and exhibits as well as special events. Meanwhile, the staff of the Joseph Priestley House, in conjunction with local scholar Jane Dupree-Begos, developed a special tour, entitled *A Woman's Place*, and added the bedroom of Elizabeth Ryland Priestley to the regular tour. These additions provide the public with its first real glimpse into the lives of the women, children, and servants who once lived there.

Next Steps

After three years of planning and activity, the pilot phase of "Raising Our Sites" was completed in April 1996. The next phase of the project, which will expand to include other historically under-interpreted groups such as laborers and servants, religious and ethnic groups, African Americans and Native Americans, will begin in 1998. Currently planning for the next phase, which includes the recruitment of new sites for participation, is underway.

The goal of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council is to bring scholarship in humanities topics, such as history, to the out-of-school American public. The focus on interpretive development at historic sites is critical to the achievement of this goal. Once most American adults leave school, visiting these sites is often the sole source of formal history instruction that they receive. Therefore, these sites need to provide as complete

and accurate a depiction of history as possible. "Raising Our Sites" provides a vehicle for sites to examine and enhance the stories that they tell and, in the process, find ways to challenge their visitors to reflect on history as it really was.

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Participating Sites in "Raising Our Sites"

Chester County Historical Society, West Chester
Drake Well Historic Site, Titusville
Folklife Documentation Center for Gender Studies, Seton Hill College
The Library Company of Philadelphia
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
Lycoming County Historical Society, Williamsport
Lehigh County Historical Society, Allentown
Lackawanna County Historical Society, Scranton
Landis Valley Museum, Lancaster
Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Elverson
Hershey Museum
Old Economy Village, Ambridge
Joseph Priestley House, Northumberland
Pennsbury Manor, Morrisville